

## 4-H Rites of Passage

....for Youth Aged 15 to 18

Growing through adolescence these days is more dangerous and difficult than ever. One reason may be the disappearance of traditional rites of passage, those accepted and honored experiences and ceremonies that used to act as benchmarks for us while growing up. Culturally appropriate rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood are critically important. Without them, adolescents are initiating each other into adulthood using the symbols of "maturity" that they see as the privilege of adults around them: alcohol, drugs, violence and sex.



4-H in Washington State offers an alternative--a culturally appropriate rite of passage through a vision fast in the wilderness. We prepare participants for as much as a 3-day fast alone without shelter or company in the wilderness. The vision fast process for participants involves 3 phases:

- separation from the world that they know and will leave behind (severance),
- time alone to think about the transition to their next stage is life (threshold), and
- Transition into their new life and status as an adult (incorporation.)

### Benefits of Rites of Passage

The individual and cultural benefits of this work parallel the life skills and self knowledge goals sought by participants in other 4-H youth development programs. Key outcomes include:

- self-knowledge (both strengths and weaknesses),
- leadership skills,
- self-esteem, self-confidence, responsibility for self and community,
- fuller access to emotions, feelings and spirit,
- respect for self and others
- honoring of the natural world that supports us all.

4-H RITE OF PASSAGE is a new addition to the WSU 4-H Challenge Program. The addition of this program adds a powerful launch pad for life after high school, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate learning of the 4-H life skills. Youth participants will begin their experience in 4-H Rite of Passage several weeks before the actual event by identifying and exploring the significance of the life stage they wish to mark. They will spend time developing a statement of intent and purpose for their participation.

### *How the program works....*

Upon arrival at the designated basecamp, participants will prepare for their time alone. They will explore the surrounding territory and locate a place of power for their own campsite. They will take to their campsites the sleeping equipment and gear they will need during their time alone and they will share with the others the intention they bring to their upcoming time alone.



A 4-H Youth contemplates life beyond high school while on a 4-H Rite of Passage experience in the wilderness.

*Photo L. Hobbs*

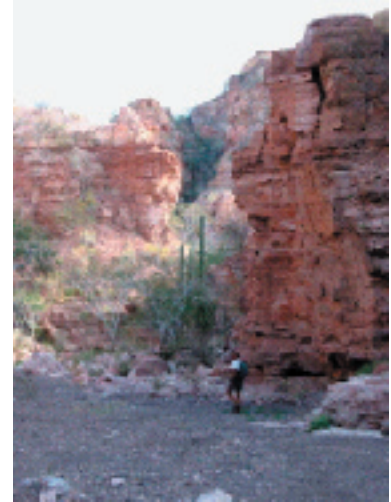
On the morning participants leave basecamp for their 3 days alone, a solemn ceremony will be held to send them off with support and in hopes of a fruitful and safe journey.

## How the program works....

While out alone, the participants will spend their time in ways they believe will help them achieve their stated intent. Some self-designed ceremonies, reading, hiking, exploration of their surroundings, and identifying significant places and events will occupy their time alone. Each person's experience is different and individual.

Upon return to basecamp, youth will be welcomed with another ceremony. The next day will be spent in returning to daily routines and filling empty stomachs. The Rite of Passage will end with participants telling their stories about their time alone and reflection about the significance of the stories to their future lives. Leaving basecamp, youth will begin a year during which they will see their lives take on the changes marked during their 4-H Rite of Passage. Participants have reported that these changes are often subtle, occurring without much conscious effort, but very significant. The Rite of Passage program was originally developed by The School of Lost Borders in California. For over 30 years they have provided vision fasts for youth and adults as well as training for future vision fast guides. The program is now available internationally.

The 4-H Rites of Passage manuals were written and peer reviewed by WSU Extension in order to tailor the program to 4-H youth and leaders-in-training. Our first leader training was held during August of 2003 during which 3 new 4-H Rite of Passage guides were trained. In August of 2004, a second leadership training will be held for 7 new guides. Five of the guides will come from YouthSource, a King County education program serving high-risk youth and young adults. Once their staff are trained as guides, they will lead approximately 40 youth from YouthBuild in their own 4-H Rite of Passage scheduled for June 2005. 4-H Rite of Passage will then become an integral part of YouthBuild's ongoing program. This partnership between King County 4-H and King County represents an important milestone in the institutionalization of 4-H within urban youth development programs. We look forward to implementing this type of partnership with other organizations in the future.



*Dare to go alone into the wilderness to affirm you past and find your future.*

*Photo L. Hobbs*

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